

## [Italian]

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Miss Mary Tomasi

63 Barre St.

Montpelier, Vt. The Granite Worker Italian

The May sun gave a thin warmth. A grapevine twisted limply around the porch post, its small, dry tendrils straggling against the rail. Here and there life manifested itself in hard, scarlet pellets pushing through the shredded bark. On a blanket spread over the rough granite step sat George Tosi huddled in a loose bathrobe, his slippered feet resting on the brown earth. He drew absently at his pipe. Two men tamping and beating a narrow stretch of ground for a bocci course held his attention. They were working in the neighboring backyard. It was Sunday, and a treat for them to be in the open away from the grey dust of the granite sheds. Occasionally they called out to George, but for the most they spoke only to each other or kept silent. Two years ago George had been Barre Street champion in his this favorite game of theirs that somewhat resembled bowling. Even last summer he had played. Against the doctor's orders, for the swinging, stretching movement of the arm and the force behind it might easily tear the tender, diseased lung tissue to the point of hemorrhage. This year, for certain, the shrivelled form on the stone step could do no more than look an at this sport.

In the kitchen Elsa Tosi scrubbed vigorously at the walls. With a sick man demanding your attention, you had to work whenever you had the time, Sunday or not, C. [?] - 11/25/40 [?]

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she explained. Wisps of moist hair escaped from her towel-turbaned head. Gold earrings dangled against the fleshy jawbones. The town clock struck three. From habit she glanced

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at the clock over the sink. "It's time for his eggnog," she said. "The doctor wants him to take eggs. He's tired of them in milk, so once in a while I make eggnogs with port or brandy."

We sat beside him as he sipped his drink.

Elsa said in a tired voice, "The onion tops are out of the ground about half a foot. When Joe comes home, why don't you take a walk down around the garage and see them.[ ?] Joe, she informed me, was the roomer. George had worked beside him in the shed. He'd roomed here four years, ever since the children left.

George cleared his throat. His words came huskily, tightly, as if pinched in his throat. Back in the old country, he said, the crops would be showing a faint green in the fields. It was May when he left Italy 36 years ago. The fifteenth. And already the potato sprouts were shoving through the earth. He and his uncle had gone by train from Valeano, his home town, through Turin, Modena, Paris, and then to Havre where they boarded the French boat, the Transatlantique. He had no choice in the selection of a boat, he admitted. His uncle, who had taught him all he knew of carving in the small granite center near Valeano, had crossed once before on the Transatlantique. He was satisfied. He'd cross on it again.

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It was his uncle who talked him into coming to Barre. It was a fast growing granite town, he said, and they paid skilled workers well. George was just thirty then; he left Elsa in Valeano and promised to send for her the next year.

"But you didn't" Elsa interrupted. "It was two years and four months."

"That's because I hadn't figured it cost so much to live in America," George explained.

Yes, he had enjoyed the trip over. They had come [stoorage?] to economize, the food was not of the best but it was substantial, and everything was clean. Cleaner - and his thin

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white face twisted at the distasteful memory - cleaner than that hotel in New York where he and his uncle spent their first night. The beds were full of vermin. Those hotels were pulled down now. He'd noticed that on a visit to New York five years ago when he'd gone to his son's graduation at Columbia.

"It's funny." Elsa mused tucking her hair under the tight towel binding, "when George left Italy I kept planning and dreaming of living in Barre. We've never even stayed there overnight. It's always been Montpelier."

They'd come from New York to Montpelier, George explained, because his uncle had left clothes and a few possessions at a friend's home. That first night they learned that [Moore's?] shed in Barre where the uncle had worked was sold. Perhaps they could have found work there. Perhaps not. The [Bianchi?] brothers who owned a shed on River Street in Montpelier offered them both work, so they stayed here.

Yes, George disliked the granite work at first. It wasn't like being in the open sheds in Italy where one could breathe a little fresh air along with the dust. And yes, he agreed, the stone was softer over there. It contained less quartz, and therefore less harmful to the lungs.

A couple of years after Elsa came to Montpelier a track was laid along Barre Street for trolley accommodations to Barre. More sheds opened in Montpelier, and for a time a number of Barre men were employed here. They carried their lunch and took the trolley back after four.

Bianchi Brothers employed only eight workers..... No, it didn't take much capital to operate a monumental business those days. The shed was originally a barn, a part of the Bianchi house. Since most of the work was done by hand, little equipment other than hand tools was necessary. The owners worked, too. They were skilled workers who wanted to be

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their own bosses. They did well, made money enough to build larger sheds, and, when machinery came in around '25, to buy that.

The two men laboring on the bocci course strolled to the porch, jackets slung over their shoulders. They were around fifty, large boned, rugged, a living memory of what George Tosi had been. "What do you hear from Marc?" one asked.

"Oh, he's fine, fine," George replied. "He makes more money and has a better time than we ever did."

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Marc? Elsa lifted the usually stilled eyebrows. Marc was their son. A lawyer now in [Chatham?], N. Y. And doing well enough to send the adopted niece Elsa to normal school. .... No, he hadn't been interested in granite, nor did she and George want him to be. Since they'd saved a little, why not spend it in preparing him for a profession that was healthier and easier?

The two men chatted briefly with the sick man, bade him farewell. His eyes followed them as they [sauntered?] across the street to the Italian Club rooms. It was time for their wine or grappa, and for a hearty discussion of politics at home and in Italy. The Club rooms had once been George's favorite haunt. He said nothing. His fingers pressed hard around the half-filled glass of eggnog. The knuckles shone white.

Elsa saw. She spoke quickly, her gold earrings bobbing, and catching the sunlight. "That trolley was handy. It'd stop right in front of the house. Sundays in summer we'd ride the Dewey Park - halfway between Montpelier and Barre, for picnics. Many of the Italians from Barre would be there, their families with them. Today the picnics are fewer, and they have them further away from home. Everybody goes in his own car."

A cloud moved lazily under the sun. George Tosi shivered.

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"We'll go in now, eh, George?" Elsa suggested. She took his arm. "Tomorrow maybe it will be nice enough to come out again —"